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SUBJECT: VIETNAM OUTREACH ON ACTIVISTS FOR DEMOCRACY AND DISSIDENTS

REF: STATE 44903

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador Michalak has named the promotion of human rights as his top priority in Vietnam. In support of the President's freedom agenda, the Ambassador has raised human rights with the highest levels of the Vietnamese government, including both the President and Prime Minister. Ambassador Michalak continues to urge the government to eliminate limitations on fundamental freedoms and advocates in cases where the government has infringed on the human rights of individuals. The Ambassador and Mission personnel meet regularly with activists for democracy, many of whom are in prison or under house arrest. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) To promote the President's freedom agenda we use diplomatic influence; targeted dialogue with government officials on the benefits to Vietnam of expanded freedoms and an improved human rights environment; public diplomacy efforts aimed at educating key decision makers, future leaders and the general public; and formal dialogues with the government on human rights and labor issues. We work closely with like-minded diplomatic missions in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to coordinate efforts on human rights.

¶3. (SBU) In his meetings with leading government officials, Ambassador Michalak continues to explain that the promotion of human rights is among his top priorities during his tenure. He calls for the government to improve the human rights situation in Vietnam, to release prisoners of conscience, and to enhance religious freedom further. Ambassador Michalak has reiterated President Bush's message to President Nguyen Minh Triet in June 2007 that, in order for the United States-Vietnam relationship to progress, Vietnam will need to do more to respect human rights.

¶4. (SBU) In his many major media events with both Vietnamese and International journalists from print, television, radio and online outlets, Ambassador Michalak has repeated his call for freedom of peaceful expression and other fundamental rights.

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador and mission personnel meet regularly with activists for democracy, many of whom are jailed or under house arrest. In HCMC, Ambassador Michalak and members of Representative Steny Hoyer's delegation met with family members and legal counsel of jailed democracy activists in January 2008. In March 2008 the Ambassador met with Nguyen Van Ly, one of Vietnam's most famous political dissidents, in his prison south of Hanoi.

¶6. (SBU) Our efforts have had concrete results. For example, when American citizen democracy activists were jailed in Vietnam in November 2007, Ambassador Michalak publicly called on the government of Vietnam to release them. Soon afterwards the activists were freed.

¶7. (SBU) In February 2006, the United States resumed its annual Human Rights Dialogue (HRD) with Vietnam. The next HRD will be held on May 29, 2008, with the U.S. delegation led by DRL Assistant Secretary Kramer. This will be another opportunity to urge Vietnam to eliminate limitations on fundamental freedoms and advocate in cases where the government has infringed on the human rights of individuals.

¶8. (U) This cable was coordinated with ConGen Ho Chi Minh City. MICHALAK